



Testimony on SB0224
Election Law – Correctional Facilities – Voter Registration and Voting
Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Mr. Chair and Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

My name is Ricarra Jones, and I am the Political Director with 1199SEIU- the largest healthcare union in the nation, where we represent over 10,000 healthcare workers in Maryland. Given the low voter turnout among formerly incarcerated individuals, a majority of whom are minorities, we are supportive of SB0224- Election Law – Correctional Facilities – Voter Registration and Voting Act of 2021.

Deep inequities exist in the modern criminal justice system. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, white, Latino and Asian populations are underrepresented in Maryland's incarcerated population, whereas Black populations are overly incarcerated. Although Black people account for 29% of the state's population, they make up 68% of prison and jail inmates and moreover, Blacks are incarcerated at more than five times the rate of whites. And this bias is not only geared toward Black men but Black women as well. According to the NAACP, the imprisonment rate for African American women is twice that of white women.

When and if these groups are released, they are subjected to several challenges, such as finding work and housing. The basic right to vote should not be among these challenges. Confusing policies have left many formerly incarcerated individuals under the false assumption that they cannot vote. Since Blacks represent most of the Maryland's prison population, these policies decrease Black voter turnout. This Act will provide the formerly incarcerated with the knowledge they need to vote and have their voices heard.

For 1199SEIU members- a majority of whom are minorities- this Act is vital for the well-being of their communities. Not only would this Act increase voter turnout among our members' neighborhoods, but this Act would also be a step closer towards equity when it comes to minority representation on key issues and political candidates.

For this reason, we believe that this Act will create the necessary structure in place to provide previously incarcerated Marylanders with the knowledge they need to cast a vote and ask that you support SB224.

Respectfully,

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